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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003549

SIPDIS

USDOJ FOR DOUG ALLEN AND JULIANA WU

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SUBJECT: KARBALA SECURITY STABLE; MILITIAS DISCREDITED

REF: A) BAGHDAD 3431 B) BAGHDAD 3033 C) BAGHDAD 2861

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Classified By: Senior Advisor Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Karbala's security situation remains good, with no sign that militia-inspired violence, which last flared in 2007, will return. Nevertheless, the province -- which local officials reckon as "the world Shi'a capital" -- remains a tempting target for malefactors. During a November 3 meeting with Senior Advisor Gray, Karbala's new Iraqi Army (IA) commander, BG Ali Musari al-Gireri, said that 91 members of Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) and the so-called "special groups" had been captured so far in 2008. He assured Gray that the ISF's greatly improved capabilities are more than a match for the militias, which he said were discredited in Karbalans' eyes. We have included biographic details on Musari in paragraph six. End summary.

Keeping the Peace...

¶2. (C) During a November 3 meeting, Karbala's new IA commander, BG Ali Musari al-Gireri, described provincial security as stable. Law and order prevails, he said, because the populace respects the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and vice-versa. He observed that the Shi'a militias -- which bedeviled

Karbala as recently as 17 months ago -- are on the run, adding that apprehending members of the JAM and the so-called "special groups" operating out of Iran remains a top priority. Musari described the ISF's greatly improved capabilities as more than a match for the militias. Responding to Gray's question about Iranian activities in Karbala, Musari said that he regards the Iranians as "harmless" because most Karbalans reject their interference. Nevertheless, he said the ISF would continue to watch the Iranians closely and that he would not hesitate to arrest the Iranian Consul if the latter were to break the law.

¶3. (C) According to Musari, 91 militia members have been captured so far during 2008, noting that intelligence from citizens plays a key role in assisting the ISF. Echoing comments made to Gray by other provincial officials, Musari stated that the JAM and rival entities are seen by Karbalans as having violated the holy city's sanctity with their deadly clashes during the Shabaniyah observances in August, 2007, and so are thoroughly discredited. For example, Musari said that citizen tips enabled the ISF to apprehend three youths who had been paid to distribute 3,000 copies of a one-page Sadrists screed near the al-Husayn and al-Abbas shrines on October 30. The one-page, photocopied

handout calls on Karbalans to "oust the occupiers" as a means of marking the upcoming tenth Islamic anniversary (which this year will correspond to November 27) of the assassinations in Najaf of Muqtada al-Sadr's father, Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr, and his two oldest brothers, allegedly by agents of the Saddam regime.

...While Easing Restrictions

¶4. (C) Musari told Gray that he is easing some of Karbala's strict security measures as the situation warrants. For example, he noted, a number of checkpoints had been removed and several long-closed roads in the province recently were re-opened. He also has ended the practice of joint IA-Iraqi Police (IP) patrols in most of the province, restricting the Army's involvement to a handful of trouble spots. The IA commander said the fight against extremists now is "an intelligence battle," suggesting that he sees gaining the population's confidence -- and thereby its information -- as more appropriate than the heavy-handed tactics that characterized provincial security under his predecessor as IA commander, MG Ra'ad Shaker Jawdat al-Hasnawi (who also was the IP commander - ref A). In response to a question from Gray, Musari admitted that he expects security problems in the run-up to provincial elections (septel), acknowledging that Karbala -- which local officials reckon as "the world Shi'a capital" -- remains a tempting target for malefactors.

¶5. (C) Although the IP lacks a strong forensic evidence capability and therefore relies on confessions to secure convictions, Musari is adamantly opposed to acquiring confessions through torture. He told Gray that he recently

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pulled two suspects from custody after suspecting they had been abused. When a physician confirmed torture, the IA commander punished several police officers and had charges dropped against the suspects. Further advancing the "you-play-nice, we-play-nice" dynamic between the ISF and Karbalans, Musari -- following his meeting with Gray -- called on Abd al-Mahdi al-Karbala'i, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani's deputy here, at the al-Husayn shrine. According to press reports, Karbala'i urged residents and visitors to cooperate fully with the security services. For his part, Musari promised a further loosening of restrictions on movements in the province, including fewer road closures.

Bio Note: A Different Kettle of Fish

¶6. (C) Musari, who appears to be approximately 50 years old, contrasts markedly with the corpulent, inveterate self-promoter, MG Ra'ad. Thoughtful, soft-spoken and trim, he projects an air of humility and introspection. Born and raised in Baghdad, Musari reports that he graduated first in his class from the Iraqi Military Academy and rose rapidly through the ranks. He served two years in India, earned a doctorate in public administration, and speaks fluent English. As a colonel in 2002, Musari ran afoul of Saddam Hussein by meeting with opposition figures. Jailed and tortured, he was sentenced to death by hanging but freed by U.S. forces in 2003. He expresses profound gratitude to the United States for Iraq's liberation. Married for 26 years, he has children and recently became a grandfather. Prior to his assignment in Karbala, Musari worked in Baghdad. He states that his goal is to avoid seeing Iraq repeat "the pain and suffering" of the Saddam era. End bio note.

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